

From the Foreign Quarterly for July.
THE REIGN OF TERROR.

"Je reconte ce que j'ai vu"—"I relate that which I have seen!" With this avowal, M. G. Duval opens his Recollections of the Reign of Terror. The announcement is certainly attractive. But M. Duval is one of those generous writers who are always better than their word; he not only relates what he has seen, but a great deal that it was utterly impossible for him to see, and, as revelations of the latter class are vouchsafed to us with the same detail and precision as the former, we are forced to acknowledge M. Georges Duval to be a person of that lively imagination, with which "to moralize a song" is not always "to stoop to truth." The plain fact is, that our author is butted of the actors and events of the French Revolution is (not without reason) so intense that, where he cannot relate as a witness, he, by no means infrequently invents as a partisan. With all the malice of Herodotus, he gives us the particulars of interviews at which he was not present, and the exact dialogue of conversations which admitted of no eaves-dropper. Besides this happy gift of invention, Nature has bestowed on M. Georges Duval a turn for banter and gallantry; and, even when relating circumstances in which he was a party concerned, his love of ironical humor and his benevolent desire to amuse the reader lead him into sundry witty exaggerations and travesties, which, while they prove his agreeable qualities as a writer, detract from our faith in him as a historian.

These allowances made, there however remains to the volumes before us much to instruct the student in his survey of the men and the times of which they treat. M. Duval confesses in his Preface the indignation with which he "regards the numerous books that have been written under the fallacious title of History of the Revolution, bearing in truth nothing better than impudent apologies for that epoch of ruin, of blood, and of tears."

It is easy to conceive the feelings of irritation and disgust with which an honest man who had actually lived amidst the horrors of Paris in the Reign of Terror, who had seen the tumbrels passing his windows to the Barricade du Trône, who had beheld the infarated mob burchering a gray-headed priest, and shouting round the head, borne on a pike, of some poor woman who had ventured to pity a benefactor, must regard the philosophizing excuses and argumentative dogmas which some would-be Friend of Liberty, and Lover of the People, issues from the security of his closet.

It is unquestionably true, indeed, that in the vices of the old régime we must seek the causes of the revolutionary crimes. It is probably rather to nations than to individuals that we are to refer the awful menace, "The sins of the fathers are visited on the sons." But no less true is it to all, whom philosophical refinements have not bewitched, that humanity itself is endangered if we allow the circumstances that conduct to guilt, to steal away our natural horror of the guilty itself. Rapidly speaking, all guilt is but the result of previous circumstance. To neglected education, to vicious example, we may trace the crimes which send the thief to the hulks and the murderer to the gibbet. But we do not therefore hold exonerated Jack Sheppard and Daniel Good. What education and example are to the man, government and legislation are to the people. We shall do right if we blame the causes which make a demon of the multitude, but most wrong if we regard the demon itself only as the suffering angel.

It is not our intention, however, to go over the beaten and hackneyed ground of the political events of that hateful time commemorated by M. Duval. We propose rather to cut a rapid path through the mighty field before us, in search only of those facts and principles which appear to us to suggest something new and not unimportant in the Philosophy of History.

The era of Modern civilization, as distinct from the Feudal, begins in France with the large and determined policy of Cardinal Richelieu. And it is from this period that we are to date the primary causes of the Revolution of the Eighteenth Century.

A high churchman and an absolute monarchist, the two-fold object of Richelieu was carried out with the simple severity of a strong mind thoroughly in earnest. To reduce Dissent into the One Church—to subjugate Aristocracy from the check upon Monarchy to the ornament of a Court; for these objects he lived, and these objects he accomplished.

He had the qualities necessary to his purpose. Had he been more virtuous he would have been crushed by the nobles—more vicious he would have scandalized the people. His ruthless severity, never capricious, though often cruel, was conducted on a broad and intelligible system: it never invaded the lives and properties of the masses; it more often secured their properties and lives, by terrible examples amongst the nobles, whose intrigues were nearly always associated with the criminal designs of a civil war. In his aim at absolute power, he was too comprehensive a statesman to meditate the erection of an oriental despotism, for he loved France even better than monarchy. He desired—as far as his wretched literary taste, and his literary jealousies yet more wretched, would permit—to encourage and circulate the refinements of intellectual cultivation. To him France is indebted for the academy, which, if not productive to literature, at least raised literature into honor. An eminent practical man, he was aware that the worst settlement of a state depends on the adequacy of its finances; and he bequeathed by the number of his followers, the noble can only impose by the extent of his rent roll. It is true, that as a body, the Aristocracy still shared with the Church the possession of the far larger portion of the state; but agriculture declined, mortgages increased, and the lands rather served for the oppression of peasants, than for adequate resources to the extravagance of the Lords. About the middle of the reign of Louis XIV., along the Seine and along the Loire, dismantled chateaux, stony fortresses, and untilled fields, were the visible signs of a fatal falling order. Thus, in the following reign, the French sceptre became not only unpopular, but despised. If a Leverrier of our own time and land were to paint the English Aristocracy according to his prejudice or opinion, he might describe them as base, but never certainly as despicable. Men never can despise the powerful—the power of the English aristocracy is every where and in every thing—power in wealth—in the affectio-

nate command of large classes not belonging to them—power in the intellect which enables them in the open contests of party, to bear comparison with men of the highest attainments in inferior grades, and to justify by their talents the offices they aspire to from their birth. The English aristocracy have few privileges and much power. Yet unquestionably the latter, with all their faults, were a sparkling, accomplished, and charming race.

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